



**MARTY OMOTO**  
**CALIFORNIA DISABILITY RIGHTS PERSPECTIVES**  
JANUARY 13, 2009 – Tuesday

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## Donald Roberts Always Remembered The People Who Were Forgotten



*Note: Services for Donald is set for Friday, January 16, at 11:00 AM at the Calvary Life Tabernacle church, 446 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in Galt, California 95632, off of Highway 99 South to Fresno. (a small town about 27 miles south of downtown Sacramento. Church is on the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and E Streets, close to Harvey Park)*

Donald Roberts is gone at age 46. He passed away on Sunday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, with his wife and family. He entered the hospital a few days before last Thursday with pneumonia and lapsed into a coma that he never came out of.

Somehow in a world of uncertainty it once seemed certain that good people – good advocates – like Donald Roberts, like Joan Lee, like Betty Bacon, and so many others, would always be there. With their

deaths this past year, and now with the unexpected loss of Donald Roberts, it seems that what is certain in life is that nothing is certain at all.

But maybe not. What is certain now is that we will miss him. And we will remember him. *[pictured left with wife Krisi at his graduation from the Partners In Policymaking Program, in Bakersfield, California in October 2008]*

We will remember how much he cared about those who were buried without a gravestone, without a name so many decades ago at the Stockton Developmental Center. He made videos about those who were buried without a marker for their names, spoke of them at meetings, wrote about it in commentaries and focused many of his art pieces about it – and his own experience of living at Stockton Developmental Center.

He wrote last July about those children buried without any marker for their names and that “...I am sad because you and I have a name and even God has a name, but why can’t these people too?” He wanted their names remembered.

Now, with his own passing, we will remember his name because his advocacy was about remembering those who others forgot.

He said often and wrote that he had a “good life” and wanted to travel to tell people, especially those who were in state hospitals or mental health institutions that they should “never, never, never give up your dreams”. He never gave up on his own dream. And his work, his life is an example to us about not giving up on ours.

Every life is unfinished and when Donald passed away, there was much left still to do. He recently, on December 26<sup>th</sup>, wrote about how he had just reconnected to his father – a person who he had not known and expressed how much he looked forward in getting to know him. There was work on advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities and others – rights that he saw being threatened by continued budget cuts to critical services that help people remain in their own homes and communities. There was his work especially on those people who were buried without a marker with their names in the state hospitals and developmental centers decades ago – a project that he wanted to move forward with new legislation, which he wanted to be called the “Donald Roberts Memorial Project”. Donald, as anyone who knew him could say, was never shy. There was so much left to do.

I will write more about Donald's life and work, but for now, I want to share his own thoughts – his own writing that he did a few months ago about his time when he was a resident of the now closed Stockton Developmental Center.

## DONALD ROBERT'S BLOG

Donald had started a blog, in mid-2008, though he didn't yet post very many entries. His first posting actually was July 12, 2008, and it was about people who were buried without grave markers or any marker that showed their names. He wrote that it is "a blessing to even have a name and not just be known with a number..."

His blog posting was also about his life when he lived at Stockton Developmental Center and his life now because he is able to "speak up for the right of me and other people".

I reproduced his blog posting here because his own words is the best tribute to his life and work. He typed this posting all in capital letters, which I left intact.



### DONALD ROBERTS BLOG – STOCKTON STATE HOSPITAL CEMETERY

[Note: Photo of Donald Roberts from 2008]

HELLO EVERYONE:

I BEEN WANTING TO SHARE MY STORY WITH EVERYONE ABOUT  
MY LIFE IN A STATE HOSPITAL.

FIRST OF ALL LET ME TELL YOU TODAY MY LIFE IS MUCH BETTER, JUST BECAUSE I AM A ADVOCATE AND I  
SPEAK UP FOR THE RIGHT OF ME AND OTHER PEOPLE.

I AM NOT MAD AT ANYONE NOT EVEN MY MOM WHO PUT ME IN A STATE HOSPITAL TO LIVE WHEN I  
WAS A YOUNG MAN IN MY TWENTIES OR MAYBE EVEN YOUNGER. I DONT REGET MY PAST AND THE  
PEOPLE THAT TOOK CARE OF ME, AND THE DOCTORS THAT WANTED ME TO LIVE, AND ALL THE  
MEDICATIONS AND TREATMENT AND SHOCK THERAPY THAT THEY PUT ME ON, AND ALSO  
EXPERIMENTAL DRUGS.

I AM A LUCKY MAN. I AM A LUCKY TO BE ALIVE BECAUSE OF THOSE PEOPLE AND MY MOM I HAVE  
CHOICES TO LIVE MY LIFE ANYWAY I WANT TO.

IT IS A BLESSING TO EVEN HAVE A NAME AND NOT JUST TO BE KNOWN WITH A NUMBER(#) MY STATE HOSPITAL HAD A CREMATION ROOM, AND A MORGUE AND A CEMETERY IN THE BACK. THERE WERE ABOUT 2,38.00 PEOPLE LOST THERE LIVES IN STOCKTON CALIFORNIA.

THEIR FAMILY PUT THEM IN THERE JUST LIKE MY FAMILY DID. BECAUSE THEY HAD A DISABILITY AND THEY DID NOT WANT TO BE SEEN IN THE COMMUNITY. THEY DID NOT HAVE A CHOICE IN THERE LIVES, WITH WHAT THEY WANTED TO DO.

I COULD HAVE BEEN ONE OF THEM IN A CEMETERY WITH NO NAME AND THAT IS WHY I DONT GIVE UP THE FIGHT, AND I CAN'T NOT REST UNTIL ALL THE PEOPLE HAVE A NAME AND BE REMEMBERED. SOME OF THE WORK I HAVE DONE AS ADVOCATE FOR THE MENTALLY ILL. AMD PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

I WAS WORKING ON A PROJECT CALLED THE "CALIFORNIA MEMORIAL PROJECT" (SB 1448) TO REMEBER ALL CALIFORNIA AND PEOPLE THAT LOST THEIR LIVES.

WELL THAT PROJECT WENT DOWN THE DRAIN AND PEOPLE IN CHARGE DON'T LIKE TO HEAR WHAT I AM SAYING.

THEY HAVE PUT NICE PLAQUES AT THE STOCKTON STATE HOSPITAL TO REMENBER PEOPLE, BU WITH NO NAMES ON THE PLAQUE. I AM SAD BECAUS YOU AND I HAVE A NAME, AND EVEN GOD HAS A NAME, BUT WHY CAN'T THESE PEOPLE TOO?

I HAVE SERVED ON THE STATE ON SOME STATE DEPARTMENT BOARDS OF CALIFORNIA AND NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR WHAT I GOT TO SAY.

I AM STILL ON THE GROUNDS OF THE OLD STATE HOSPITAL, THE DIFFERENCE IS I GET TO GO HOME TO MY WIFE. I AM ALSO A ARTIST AND I AM USING MY ART TO TELL MY STORY. I AM MAKING A SERIES OF CERAMIC FACES OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE LOOKED AT ME IN THE PAST. AND TOLD ME NO. (HAPPY AND SAD AND ANGRY FACES)

THIS IS SOMTHING THAT I DEAL WITH IN EVERYDAY LIFE, AND I HAVE LEANED A IMPORTAIN THING IN LIFE AND THAT IS I HAVE LEARNED TO BE PATIENT AND FORGIVING, AND UNDERSTANDING AND I LEARNED TO WALK AWAY AND TO ACCEPT PEOPLE.

I AM MOTIVATED SPEAKER AND I HAVE COMPASSION. I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I WOULD BE WORKING WITH KIDS THAT HAVE AUTISM.

*I AM VERY HAPPY WITH MY LIFE. I WISH I COULD TRAVEL THE COUNTRY OR U.S., AND TELL PEOPLE MY STORY AND TELL PEOPLE THAT HAVE BEEN IN MENTAL HEALTH OR THE STATE HOSPITAL NEVER NEVER NEVER GIVE UP YOUR DREAMS.*

*MY HERO IS DR MARTIN LUTHER KING. HE SAID TODAY I HAVE A DREAM AND MY SAYING IS I AM LIVING IN THE DREAM.*

*IT CAN'T GET ANY BETTER THAN THIS, BUT WE ALL MOST BE A ADVOCATE WE ALL LET STATE WORKERS KNOW HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO CONTINUE TO GET THE SERVICES THAT WE GET AND WHERE WE LIVE IT.*

*WE ARE NOT ASKING FOR RAISES OR JUST ASKING FOR NO MORE CUTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITES AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU LIVE YOUR DREAMS TOO, AND YOUR VOICES BE HEARD, AND THIS MY STORY AND MY NAME IS DONALD ROBERTS."*

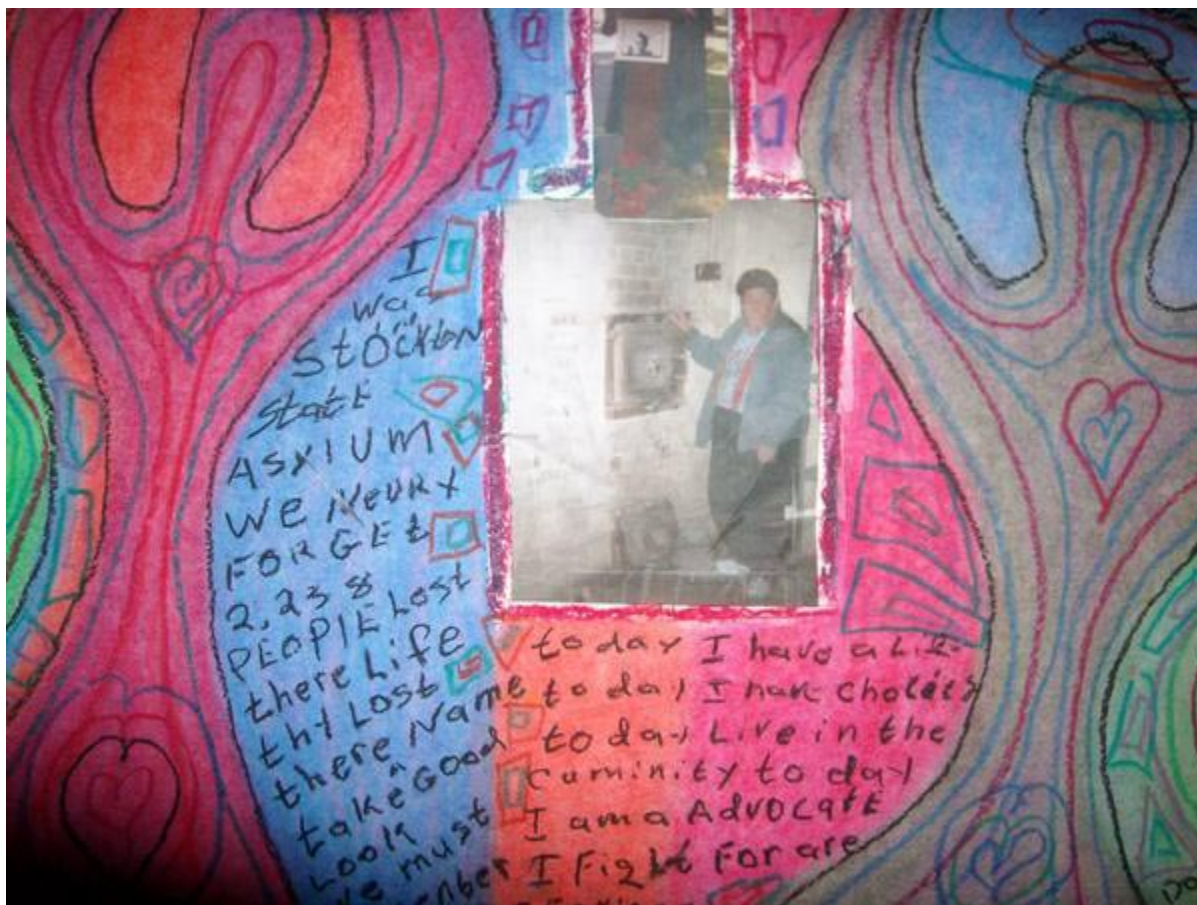
## **DONALD ROBERTS YOUTUBE VIDEOS**

Donald also made a couple of short video clips that he posted on YouTube dealing with the discovery of several bodies in unmarked graves at the grounds of the old Stockton Developmental Center. The issue always troubled Donald because, as he said in the video "everyone has a name" and he made it part of his advocacy to see that their names were found.

Here are the links to view two his videos – one where he is on camera (though the view of his face is not clear) and the second video which has his voice talking about the Stockton Developmental Cemetery

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ-fh1gIdS8>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BBe\\_IRjCNE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BBe_IRjCNE)



## DONALD ROBERT'S ARTWORK

Donald loved art – and his time at Stockton Developmental Center was often the subject of his work. In the piece reproduced here (left), he includes words that describes his time at the state hospital and also how he feels about his life in the community afterwards. In the center of the artwork is a photo of Donald at the old Stockton Developmental Center crematorium.

## DONALD'S WEBSITE COMMENTS

Donald put up some photos of his artwork and some other pictures on his MySpace website.

On his site he wrote briefly about his life and work titled "Donald's Blurbs". I am re-producing it. He writes a little bit about his time at the Stockton Developmental Center, some of its history and also about the people who died there and were buried – some without grave markers.

That troubled him a lot and he focused much of his advocacy about correcting that wrong. He dedicated his MySpace website to the "people that lost their lives at the Stockton State Hospital (as it was known)"



He ends his blurb with a line that seems more haunting and poignant now with his death, saying that he wanted to get a bill introduced in the California Legislature called the “Donald Roberts Memorial Bill” to push for a project – like the California Memorial Project that worked to remember people who died at the state institutions, but that would work to find and remember the names of people who were buried without any mention of their names. He always believed it was important that the world remembered their names and not just the fact that they were buried in unmarked graves.

I am going to work to see that he gets that bill. I know others will too. – Marty Omoto

*Donald’s Blurbs (on his MySpace website by Donald Roberts)*



*My Name is Donald Roberts.*

*[Note: wedding photo left of Donald and Krisi Roberts]*

*My website is about the California Memorial Project. This project started in 1999 with bill that that Governor Gray Davis sign into law and was improved by the legislators that we are to remember people that died in State Hospital throughout the State of California, and we must never forget this.*

*This bill is SB 1448. I was started working on the project because I was asked by certain people to help them with the history of the Stockton State Hospital Developmental Center.*

*My Mother like many other mothers out there put me in the State Hospital to be safe. It wasn't because I had a criminal history, it was because I had a developmental disability, and I*

*have Mental Retardation.*

*The unit that lived in I lived with others had a crematorium room in the basement. I was asked by the city of Stockton to go back and work with a company called Groupe Commercial company and name all the buildings that was left and the land was sold by the State of California and bought by the Stockton City Council.*

*When I went out the tour for this I said yes I would help them, but in return I wanted information that was only shared with me and the company group about the stories that I had heard about. like the crematorium room. I said to them would you take me down there to see it and that was the first thing they did.*

*The last date of someone ever being cremated was in 1969. It has no names on the wall but it had check marks. There was over 100 check marks on the wall.*

*I said to them the Stockton State Hospital had a cemetery and it was in the back and they said to me no. Two years ago they found a cemetery in the back where I said there was a cemetery. There was also another cemetery over by Alpine Market by California ST. Now there are two gravesites at Stockton Rural Cemetery.*

*The 40 human remains that they found where all kids that were buried with a hospital robe and a little girl with cracked skull.*

*I was very sad when I found out this information so I dedicated this website to the people that lost there lives at the Stockton State Hospital.*

*I am going start a old bill into a new bill called the "Donald Roberts Memorial Bill" because I have written to the legislators for their help about this and yes they would help me with the "Donald Roberts Memorial Bill. "*

Donald also wrote on his page about the people who he would like to meet:

*"I would like to meet people that work for the radio, television news. people that would like to do a story on me about this project because this project is truly very important to me because I lived in the state hospital and I feel that my story should be shared so people out there could really see how they treated these people in those days and how it is now. I would also like to meet survivors that are still living and hear their story how they made it and what they are doing with their self now, because the way they treated people in the State Hospital is not the way we are treated now. We are treated with Dignity and Respect and that something they did not have in the old days.*

**SIDEWALK PROTEST AND RALLY JANUARY 15, 2009 – WILL ALSO HONOR DONALD ROBERTS**



**Please join our sidewalk protest on January 15, 2009 Thursday morning from 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM in front of the State Capitol, (L Street at 11<sup>th</sup> Street) to coincide with the Governor's delivery of his annual "State of the State" address to be given Thursday morning. Similar sidewalk protests are planned at the Governor's field offices throughout the State, including Los Angeles, to be held at the same time as the protest in Sacramento.**

**We will be doing these protests in memory and in honor of our friend Donald Roberts and in tribute also to his wife Krisi.**

When I wrote the original commentary in December 2003 – my first one – titled "Its About Hope", one sister – Alana, who had developmental disabilities, had passed away just months before - but my younger sister was still alive. A year later she was gone too – and so many other good friends and advocates. Natasha Littletree, Warren Mattingly, Noel Nuedeck, Jim Sanford, Betty Bacon, Shirley Klein, Bob Roberts, Joan Lee and so many others.

Just two days after I wrote and sent out my commentary "Its About Hope Again" on January 9, 2009 and the Action Alert, Donald passes away after lapsing into a coma from complications due to pneumonia.

As I wrote on January 9<sup>th</sup>, I think those losses weigh heavily on all of us who knew them – and it makes more difficult the fights each year (since late 2001) against spending cuts that we have been forced to wage – more desperate and seemingly futile. I think a lot of us feel more alone and feel a greater sense of despair and weariness.

With all the budget cuts proposed, and the passing of so many friends and good people like Donald Roberts, it may seem like a desperate time – and it is. And it may feel futile to fight. But it is not. We can get through this.

We need to mobilize as one community and fight with and for each other – not in the name of a program or service, but for the rights of our children and families and friends to have those services and supports – and for the rights of inclusion, choice and independence. For hope and for justice.

And so, as we have done before – as others have done before, we will need to let the Governor and Legislature know that we are here to speak for justice. And when we do that, we will always remember, that this struggle and our fight is always about hope. It is about remembering and honoring our friends, like Donald Roberts. It is about all of us. We all have names, as Donald said. And we will be there to remind the Governor and Legislature that we will not be forgotten.

Marty Omoto

## **MARTY OMOTO COMMENTARY AND ACTION ALERTS**

*This is a periodic personal commentary and ACTION ALERTS by Marty Omoto, director/advocate of the California Disability Community Action Network (CDCAN). These commentaries represent the personal opinion of Marty Omoto only - and does not necessarily represent the viewpoints or opinions of anyone else. These commentaries are separate from the CDCAN Reports, which strive to be objective in getting information out to people with disabilities, mental health needs, seniors, their families, workers and others.*

*Address inquires to Marty Omoto, CDCAN at 1225 8th Street, Suite 480, Sacramento, CA 95814 916/446-0013 or email [martyomoto@rcip.com](mailto:martyomoto@rcip.com) Website: <http://www.cdcan.us> to get the free non-partisan CDCAN Disability News Reports and to view archived copies. Omoto's sister Alana had developmental and other disabilities. Since 2000, CDCAN Reports and commentaries go out to over 45,000 people with disabilities, seniors, families, Asian and Pacific Islanders disability groups, other minority advocacy groups, organizations, policymakers, media and others across California. It is okay to forward this - just provide attribution.*

## **PLEASE HELP CDCAN CONTINUE ITS WORK!!!**

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**1225 8th Street Suite 480**

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*Note: the paypal option on the CDCAN website is working*